

STATEMENT
OF
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(MILITARY COMMUNITY AND FAMILY POLICY)
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON MANAGEMENT, INVESTIGATIONS, AND
OVERSIGHT
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
HEARING ON
EXAMINING THE DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND
SECURITY'S EFFORTS TO RECRUIT, HIRE, AND PROMOTE
VETERANS

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and members of the Management, Investigations, and Oversight Subcommittee, for the opportunity to appear before you today to reiterate the Department of Defense's commitment to providing the assistance and support that is needed to meet the challenges confronting our severely injured and wounded Service members and their families. In addition to the Department's efforts, each individual Service has its own programs to assist wounded warriors. We share the mission to improve the quality of life of our wounded Service members and their families.

The specific reason for my being here today is to highlight just one of our programs – Operation Warfighter. The Department has sponsored Operation Warfighter for two years as a temporary assignment program for Service members who are convalescing at Military Treatment Facilities in the National Capital Region. This program is designed to provide recuperating Service members with meaningful activity outside of the hospital environment that assists in their wellness and offers a formal means of transition back to the military or civilian workforce. The program's goal is to match Service members with opportunities that consider their interests and utilize both their military and non-military skills, thereby creating productive assignments that are beneficial to the recuperation of the Service member and their outlook on the future.

Since 2006, we have placed 315 Service members within 80 participating Federal agencies and subcomponents. There is no shortage of employment opportunities, and many of our new agency partners result from specific requests by Service members for a particular type of work. The average length of an assignment is three to five months for 15 to 25 hours a week.

To meet new Service members for the program, the Department holds regular info sessions twice a month at Walter Reed Army Medical Center (WRAMC). Federal employers in the program are also invited to attend these sessions to speak about their job and career opportunities.

Service members must be medically cleared to participate in Operation Warfighter, and work schedules need to be flexible and considerate of the candidate's medical appointments. Under no circumstance will any Operation Warfighter assignment interfere with a Service member's medical treatment or adversely affect the well-being and recuperation of Operation Warfighter participants.

Through this program, Service members are able to build their resumes, explore employment interests, develop job skills, and gain valuable Federal

government work experience to help prepare them for the future. Many Operation Warfighter participants will transition out of the military due to a medical retirement. It has been our experience that, while these Service members will no longer be in “uniform,” the large majority are still interested in serving their country in some capacity and see working for the Federal government as an ideal solution.

The Federal agencies and subcomponents acting as employers in the program have benefited from the considerable talent and dedication of these recuperating Service members. Approximately 40 permanent job placements have resulted from Operation Warfighter assignments upon the Service member's medical retirement and separation from military service.

The Department of Homeland Security has been one of the most active participating agencies in the Operation Warfighter program. Within the Department of Homeland Security alone, we have placed 40 Service members, 12 of whom were permanently hired. One recent successful placement was that of SPC Robert Kaminski, who began working with the Federal Air Marshal Service last April while he was convalescing at WRAMC. Specialist Bob Kaminski was assigned to Flight Operations during his recuperation from loss of a leg from an

Improvised Explosive Device explosion. His colleagues remarked, "Bob was given relevant, meaningful work from day one, and he was a valued asset. His qualities of dedication, good humor, and courage were an inspiration to the entire division, and served as a reminder of the importance of our ongoing mission."

When he became eligible for the Community Based Health Care Organization program to receive his outpatient care close to his home in western Pennsylvania, the Federal Air Marshal Service retained him in their Pittsburgh field office. He recently wrote to us, "If you want, tell them about my story. I think it's a great opportunity for the wounded warriors coming back. Thanks again for all your help." Another success story is that of SGT Elmer Armstrong, who worked an Operation Warfighter assignment with the United States Secret Service for almost a year. When he transitioned out of the military this past September, the Secret Service hired him. While the focus of Operation Warfighter will always be on the work experience that a candidate receives, many agency partners have looked at the program as a vehicle to hire transitioning Service members.

Operation Warfighter is not just about employment. For many recovering Service members, the program represents the first opportunity to return to work outside of the hospital environment. It is a time for easing transitions, for rediscovery during reintegration, for increasing self-worth. *Placing Service*

members in supportive work settings that positively impact the recuperation process is the underlying purpose of the program. We view this program as being immensely important in rebuilding lives, one life at a time. We are committed to helping any and all who need our help to do so, and we appreciate your interest in the program.

Thank you.